

# RIVERWISE

*trust the current, hold fast to one another*

Spring 2023, Issue XXI



SPRING 2023, ISSUE XXI

# RIVERWISE

## MANAGING EDITOR

Megan Douglass

## ASSISTANT EDITOR AND SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Valerie Jean Blakely

## RIVERWISE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Laura Bailey Brandon  
Eric Campbell  
Rukiya Colvin  
Lynelle Herdon  
Gloria House  
Shea Howell  
Dan Ignacio  
Alyson Jones-Turner  
William Langford  
Drew Pineda

## LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

Alexa Borromeo  
Megan Douglass

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Laura Bailey Brandon  
Valerie Jean Blakely  
Megan Douglass

## PODCAST AND WEB SUPPORT

Khary Frazier

## DISTRIBUTION

Detroit Metro Times  
pridesource  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Special Citizen's Empowerment Issue of 2022, we accidentally misspelled Tonya Myers Phillips' name with an extra 'e' in some areas. We would like to formally recognize and apologize for those mistakes! We appreciate you Tonya!

## SPECIAL THANKS

27th Letter Books for being a dedicated distribution location for Riverwise! Find our box at the front of their store!; We The People Michigan for hosting our Visionary Resistance Poetry Workshop with Tawana Petty; Zella's Bakery for donating delicious vegan food for our last Community Gathering!

Photo by Laura Bailey Brandon taken at Hiawatha National Forest (Upper Peninsula, MI)

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## Mission Statement

### WHO

*Riverwise* is a community-based magazine created by a team of authors, writers, photojournalists, parents, grandparents, students, organizers, activists, artists, educators and visionaries. We are working to create media that reflects local activism and the profound new work being done in and around Detroit neighborhoods. We envision deepening relationships through media that serves as an essential part of weaving beloved communities. We will celebrate personal Detroit stories and the process of evolving ideas.

### WHAT WE NEED AND WHY

*Riverwise* needs your stories of resilience, visionary resistance, place-based education, self-determination and sustainable, creative ways of transforming yourselves and your communities. By sharing resources and encouraging open participation of engaged citizens, especially people of color, *Riverwise* shall help us examine our own personal and political contradictions and generate lasting solutions.

Join us for a *Riverwise* Community Gathering & Workshop and our political education series Pollinating Pedagogy. Email us or follow us on social media to stay in the loop on upcoming *Riverwise* events!

Submit an article, personal anecdote, poem, interview, photo, or illustration of your own for our next edition. Submissions should not be more than 1,500 words, and may be edited for content or space.

Help get the word out! *Riverwise* is always looking for new places to live and engage with the community. Can you help distribute in your neighborhood, share some space for a few magazines or allow us to place a distribution box at your business? If so please email us to let us know you'd like to assist!

### CONTACT TO SUBMIT ARTICLES AND PHOTOS

Email: [riverwiseinthed@gmail.com](mailto:riverwiseinthed@gmail.com)


Letters: 3061 Field Street, Detroit, MI 48214


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### ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

**Monica Isaac** is a mixed media artist living on the eastside of Detroit. She interacts with art as a tool of education and resistance in order to shape her creative work. Specifically, she uses film photography to explore/inform a political and cultural counter narrative.

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Poetry as VISIONARY RESISTANCE TO THE SYSTEMS OUT TO GET US  
A *Riverwise* Community Gathering feat.  
Revolutionary Detroit Poet & Activist  
**Tawana Petty**



Poet Tawana Petty led the *Riverwise* Collective for the workshop "Poetry as Visionary Resistance to the Systems Out to Get Us" in February at the WTPMI headquarters in Detroit



# We've Always Been All We Need:

## *Mutual Aid As Radical Co-Conspiratorship Throughout History*

RIVERWISE EDITORIAL BY MEGAN DOUGLASS

There is something irresistible about being a part of spaces aimed at overthrowing systems which pit human beings against one another. From passionate debates in community centers over strategic visions and growing gardens that will feed whole communities, to working together to expose official corruption and supporting one another when the lights and water are turned off, there is a deep sense of connection and spirit that only “doing the work” provides. And, while many of us have heard the term before, we might not be aware just how entrenched mutual aid is in our lives.

Mutual aid is the process whereby a group decides to protect one another. It may involve feeding those who are hungry, sheltering those without homes, offering financial assistance when needed, or providing services for free to others in your community. An underlying understanding is that when we share openly and transparently across the struggles of life our burdens become less so, our connections with one another become deeper, and our communities become stronger as our reliance upon violent and extractive systems becomes less necessary.

When we see ourselves as only as strong as our most vulnerable members everyone benefits. There is a reason why so many in organizing say things like “this isn’t a job, it’s a lifestyle.” To be convinced that your liberation, your humanity, is rooted in all of the various lives around you (human or not), is to realize just how bleak, how inhumane, how dissatisfying it truly is to live as if the earth and the creatures on it are only here in service of profit. And, it takes only a quick glance through history to realize that we have survived because of mutual aid, in spite of the systems which treat life on this planet as disposable.

One of the most famous examples of mutual aid is of the Underground Railroad. Along the treacherous journey

to freedom that captured peoples endured, numerous abolitionists opened their homes, churches, and businesses, providing food, shelter, news, and whatever protection they could along the way. Without these networks, escape and survival would have been highly unlikely. In Detroit, mutual aid societies sprung up as those already established sought to nurture newly freed people who often had little with them save their spirit and talent.

Other more recent examples of mutual aid networks throughout history include The Black Panthers and The Young Lords who sought to subvert disinvestment in Black, Brown and Poor communities by offering free breakfast programs, health services, educational resources, and political training in their communities.

Women’s rights have an intimate connection to mutual aid as well. In the fight for safe abortion access, women have long relied upon clandestine networks created to counter the illogical and unrealistic demands put upon them. In the 1960’s, through an underground network known as “the service”, “Janes” would help one another find access to safe abortion providers. Such programs not only served to save lives, but to call attention to the often deadly nature of establishment doctrines.

**Such legacies of mutual aid have never just been about minoritized communities. Indeed, unions and fraternal societies, of which membership is often largely white and male, are also directly tied to practices of mutual aid.** As noted by author Maya Adereth, “between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, thousands of “fraternal societies” provided access to healthcare, paid leave, and life insurance to workers in nearly every major city.” (read her excellent article in Jacobin Magazine about the history of mutual aid in the U.S. here: <https://jacobin.com/2020/06/mutual-aid-united-states-unions>)

Knowing all of this, why is it then that so many people remain committed to “bootstrapping” models that tell us we must go it alone to succeed? A quick discussion about evolutionary theory is illuminating. If we examine the idea of “the survival of the fittest” we can expose the ways in which pseudoscientific or popularized understandings of human evolution have distorted our social and societal beliefs. This ideology is used to justify policies and practices that dehumanize the needs of the most vulnerable members of our communities and argue that individual struggle and competition between and among species is the backbone of survival. But did you know that even Darwin himself pushed back against centering this factor of animal behavior as primary to his theory? Did you know that there is a parallel theory of evolution that has been largely suppressed?

In his 1902 treatise *Mutual Aid*, Russian anarcho-communist revolutionary and evolutionary scientist Peter Kropotkin railed against theories which underscored competition as primary to a species’ survival. Through his research, and that of countless others, Kropotkin argued that a penchant towards individualism and oppression was an unnatural manifestation of cynical economics and that cooperation was a far superior indicator of the ability for a group to sustain itself, and the ecosystems it relies upon.

Today, we continue to grapple with the damage caused by worldviews which support such punitive ideologies. However, those within our beloved community networks are also keenly aware of the power in lifestyles, policies, and practices which uplift our shared struggle, our commonality, our deep need for one another as the only truly sustainable and humane way forward. No one, not even the most devout conservative capitalist got anywhere on their own. And it’s way past time that we put to bed a theory which is only marching us toward more division, less



stability and safety, more damage to our planet. It is time to see our connections with one another, our stewardship of our water, air, and all natural resources, our care for other species, and our service to others as the actual test of "fitness" when it comes to true intergenerational and environmental survival.

**To organize from such a place, is to fully understand the calls for abolition by those who see the deep trauma and harm that our violent systems create and maintain. It is why we call for an end to the cycles of mistrust, abuse, denigration, and damage that don't actually lead us to a path towards survival.** To organize from such a place is to fully recognize that mutual aid is the antithesis of neo-liberal capitalist formations, that mutual aid is rooted in abolition.

We see this world reflected in many of our articles in this edition. Michelle Martinez and Gabriela Santiago-Romero speak of how organizers banded together after natural disasters. We see this care in Julia Cuneo's tale of young people rising up and rejecting the narrative that change is impossible. We celebrate the activist networks written about by darien hunter-golston which worked to get out the vote in order to enshrine legislation in Michigan to protect the rights of those with uteruses to make decisions about their own bodies.

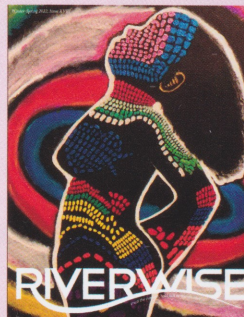
Poets and artists provide other ways of relating to the world and ourselves. Most pointedly, this edition's sacred space centerfold, created by artist Evan Lockhart, exposes the ways in which transgender experiences highlight the power and ability for all of us to rebuild, redesign, and reshape the new out of the old. It reminds us that as humans, who are able to make conscious choices about how we want to live, we don't have to be limited by what we see, what we are told must be taken for granted, and what has always been. It reminds us that joining the future we want can happen now.

This year, as Riverwise enters its 5<sup>th</sup> year of existence (Woo hoo! Thank you all for helping us to get here!), our dedication to supporting our communities, to growing our connections, to deepening our "right-relationship" with the world, remains as strong as ever. We share these stories of mutual aid, of possibility, to show that there is a place for joy within the movement. We share these stories so that everyone knows there is a place for them, that we see you, and that we appreciate you. We share these stories because we know we can't do any of this alone. As we look forward to many more years, we call upon everyone to help drive this culture shift away from the belief that going it alone is a good idea.

Let's reimagine life based on mutual aid. Let's think of the trickles that turn into streams, that run into rivers, that fill the lakes and oceans. Let's think of the trees, who through mycorrhizal (fungi-based) networks in their roots deep underground work together to keep one another alive, share resources, warn one another of danger. Let's think of the bees, who focus their energy on ensuring that whatever they may do alone will benefit the greater good of their community. And then let's think that all of that also ensures our survival. Let's flip the script. After all, as our collective conversations remind us, the times we feel most joy are when we're all together, when our communities are working hand in hand, when our natural proclivity towards nurturing one another is allowed to flourish.

Reference: Kropotkin, P. (1902). *Mutual Aid*. McClure Phillips & Co. New York

## Riverwise Celebrates 5 years of community connection!



21 Editions Printed since 2017 featuring stories of community resilience and visionary resistance and the transformative poetry, music, and artwork of artists and activists from Detroit and beyond.

34 podcasts produced providing an alternative medium for our community to be heard and gain critical knowledge of the past and present.



100's of community members engaged, connected, and trained through our monthly gatherings, workshops, and educational series.

100s of subscribers and an active distribution & readership network of over 10,000 people across Detroit, nationally, and internationally.



**FOR YOUR SUPPORT,  
LOVE, & FAITH IN OUR  
WORK TO WEAVE  
BELOVED COMMUNITY...**



**WE THANK YOU FOR  
HELPING TO KEEP THE  
CURRENT FLOWING!**



# fly for Detroit

POEM BY TIM'M WEST

u Fly  
so fly back  
fly black to industrial complexes  
feeding on soul food  
lick fingers till they drip poems  
till they raise souls unfinished  
rebuke anyone who says  
the soul has left Motown  
cuz on wide-eyed, nostalgic strips  
concrete jungles crack  
to make room for tomorrow's  
prayers for the breathing  
f\*\*k bourgie mofos scurred  
of your earth-tones  
your skreet swaggar  
your possibility

grip it  
grip it like your hand take hold a lover  
excess softening in ya palm  
rested like an overdue nap  
echoed and shadowing  
like the bass of southern crunk speakers  
lickin' eardrums  
pause long enough to sense self  
that leg of your family  
that left Lower Arkansas or "Sweetport"  
Ark-La-Tex'd elsewhere  
took freedom trains up yonder  
where freedom's a FORD promise  
where your peoples pave the path  
for futurity

there is JOY in Detroit  
the simple sophistication of n\*\*\*\*s  
with hopes tattooed on their faces  
smiles, flirtations, or mean mugs  
the chameleon canvass carried  
like something delicate  
faces changing with whatever you give back  
these are a people who  
hold the moisture of soul in their locs  
and say come indulge

Berry-sweet hopes so juicy  
lips collect dew at the thought of it  
like liquor lips that nourish  
the parts of your body  
that need to "feel" felt  
help you celebrate being some body  
where no one knows you  
but everyone seems to know enough  
to welcome you

then inhale a heavy breath respite  
then ex-hell as strong as your dreams of love  
till the 7th breath resuscitates  
gives shapes to tomorrows  
fills tears with courage  
fills lungs with optimism  
like how it feels to fill a hole again  
reconstruct self

they will erect a monument  
people will remember you over and again  
will etch your name into stone  
claim you like you were born there  
remembering that you  
became yourself (again) there  
an Easter Sunday resurrection

fly back  
fly black  
you fly.

*Tim'm T. West is an educator, poet, youth advocate, and hip-hop artist who has spent decades traveling the nation, teaching about issues at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and social justice. A long-time board member of the LGBTQ Institute at the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta where he has also served as a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion consultant, Tim'm was recently named Executive Director of the LGBTQ Institute. Named one of thirty-one icons during LGBTQ history month in October 2015, Tim'm is the founder and host of The Brave Educator podcast and lives in Cincinnati.*





# Legacies of Mutual Aid in the Rising Tide

BY MICHELLE MARTINEZ & GABRIELA SANTIAGO-ROMERO

In June 2021, tens of thousands of homes were flooded as massive and unprecedented rainfall in Detroit met inadequate and disinvested water and energy infrastructure. The highways filled to the brim as pumping stations failed. Stalled cars lined Grand River, their owners having failed at trying to get through deep puddles. Flooded railway viaducts boxed in entire neighborhoods, making throughways impassable. The combined sewage overflows backed-up into people's basements flooding their homes with dark, untreated waters. The city struggled under the weight of what some named "a thousand-year flood".

Neighbors and families scrambled to figure out how to clean up their homes. Environmental justice leaders and activists from across the city were ready to help. But, this network of helpers didn't just appear out of thin air. They are a part of an intentional and dedicated community of people who are keenly aware of the dangers and potential disasters our cities will face in light of unchecked environmental pollution. They are also part of a community who is keenly aware that when disaster does strike, there is nothing at all as strong as love to help us overcome whatever we may face.

This particular coalition was established during the summer of 2020, when a group of us involved in community work set up a mutual aid network during the pandemic. The group dubbed itself SW Detroit Community Cares and reached hundreds of families with emergency food, diapers, and cash

when the state went into lock-down. Though social service agencies were unable to quickly pivot, within weeks we had raised tens of thousands of dollars through crowd-sourcing, set up a mobile food station, and begun helping families. Old school phone banks, social media channels and WhatsApp groups all went into action to assist residents of SW Detroit with translators ready in English, Spanish and Arabic.

We had drivers deliver food, which was picked up at a pop-up food hub. We ordered groceries because InstaCart was just inaccessible; some food distributors donated produce that would have otherwise gone bad. A team of folks was calling members of the community who signed up for assistance, many it turns out just wanted a compassionate ear. One team of suburban GenZ kids, who stepped up to help, were phone-banking their wealth-stable friends and parents to generate donations. This enabled us to issue checks to people cut off from their jobs, some just one paycheck away from nothing, some taking care of families here in the US or in native homelands—a devastating quandary across the board.

That mutual aid labor we did during the lock-down in 2020, established the rapid response communication network that would help us during the 2021 flood. In just 24 hours we had teams of people cleaning out the basements of elders, the disabled, and those



*Instagram post from @camera\_jesus of people canoeing on I-94 after the June flood of 2021*

who are undocumented. While our assistance may have been just a small part of what many of our community members needed to get their homes and lives back on track, this kind of outreach during a crisis often can't be quantified. And, for quite a few of the people we helped, it was critical.

When your home floods, you can lose everything. Water heaters, washers, dryers, boilers, furniture, wedding dresses, photos, memories. Streets were littered with people's entire lives, their savings, their hopes. People were grieving, and in shock, some angry, or just at a loss.

It is important to note that EPA Administrator Michael Regan came to town and highlighted the need to replace and repair infrastructure and that Debbie Dingell and Rashida Tlaib toured flooded areas to raise awareness. Yet, the





(Left) Gabriela Alcazar helping direct volunteers as they remove a washing machine from an elder's home impacted by the flood. (Right) Volunteers plunge the basement trap of a home in SW Detroit.

approximately 30,000 people who applied for flood aid were denied by the Great Lakes Water Authority. Despite the electrical failures on the part of DTE Energy, who is ultimately responsible for pumping water, and clearing backlogged catchments at critical water exchanges. GLWA contended no amount of preparedness could have prevented this magnitude of flood. Since it was "Mother Nature's" fault, she became the perfect silent scapegoat. GLWA was not legally beholden to provide assistance. So who do we hold responsible if not the nation and its institutions?

Community, the will to help one another-- not politics-- is the social technology that will bring stability to our lives. Candidates on the mayoral campaign blamed climate change -- but climate change doesn't have a bank account and can't be fined for malfeasance. Climate also can't simply be voted out. While certainly we must be able to hold our elected leaders and state institutions to account, it is also important that we all take seriously our own collective responsibility to stop consuming fossil fuels, to pay attention to the ways in which our lifestyles directly contribute to climate change, and so directly contribute to the increase in the occurrence and severity of natural disasters in our communities.

We must redefine the collective responsibility that will be needed to combat the crises of climate change, racial injustice, and inequality. We must use every tool we have, as these disasters grow stronger and come faster. Our visions for the future have to include the care for Earth and each other as we redesign social and political systems, and institutions. For example one of our anchors and leaders, Gabriela Santiago Romero is now seated in City Council due in part to her ability to mobilize and provide aid to her community during this last crisis. It's not a call for a dependency upon institutionalized care, rather an understanding that we need to align our governance with a spirit of mutuality through crises.

Mutual aid is beyond just today or yesterday. It is the time-honored practice of self-emancipation through periods of hardship. There is nothing special or sensational about these actions -- many people picked up brooms and bleach. Let's name that mutual aid is the legacy given to us by our ancestors who fought for freedom from bondage, borders, and bosses. Whether it's water and food, money and banking, a bed, a safe place away from harm, or taking care of the children and elders--these are the practices of care for the commons.

What's new is the unknown and increasingly calamitous nature of climate disaster. How will Detroiters respond to multiple compounding threats to our survival? What kinds of practices will we embrace? What types of relationships must we create for safety and trust, with each other, regardless of where one comes from, who they love or what they look like? Who must we hold accountable for this level of destruction?

Mutual aid is the reclaiming of the spiritual ties that bind us, to actively remake ourselves beyond the victimhood rendered through the ruptures of perpetual removal. Detroit is the confluence, the cross-roads, of multitudes of histories of mutual aid. Mutual aid is people helping one another and reclaiming the power to demand dignity in our lives.

**Michelle Martinez** is a 4th generation Detroiters and has been practicing environmental justice in the city since 2006. She lives on the westside with her family where she's working on restoring Earth with native flowers. She is a frequent contributor to Planet Detroit and loves fishing with her mom.

**Gabriela Santiago-Romero** is an immigrant from Mexico and a Southwest Detroit native. She is the current Detroit City councilmember for District 6. She made history by becoming the first out female LGBTQ person to serve in this capacity. She's a community activist and organizer who has extensive experience working for Detroit nonprofits and local government. Love and food fuel her work.



# Nexus (Mackinac Bridge)

POEM BY WILLIAM T. LANGFORD IV

What they *don't* tell you about bridge-building  
is that it's all about the rivets.

You see,  
the industrial strength braided steel cables and  
iron bar-reinforced trusses  
seem to merit the most attention...

But again, it's all about the  
rivets,  
in their miniature millions  
amassing to hold it all together.

Everything is made this way,  
if you look closely,  
you'll see  
the clear blue sky  
is held together  
by our collective belief  
that we can hold it up.

So when you begin  
again to wonder  
if we could build a bridge  
to someplace  
more unified,  
you will know  
where to strike  
your hammer.



"Nexus" Original Photograph by William T. Langford IV.  
Will "The Poet" Langford is an artist and educator from  
Detroit, Michigan. For more, visit [www.WillThePoet.com](http://www.WillThePoet.com).



# The Language of Waters Speaks to Us All

BY OLIVIA GUARISCO

I believe that art is a universal language. It is a form of communication that every individual can understand, no matter their origin, no matter the language that rolls off their tongue, no matter their individuality. It is through this principle that I craft my art.

One of my first pieces began in 2019 at the annual Water is Life festival in Mackinac City, Michigan. Water is Life is an event that takes place each year during Labor Day. During the event people from around Michigan are invited to learn more about protecting the water in the Great Lakes state and the work being done by Water Protectors across the nation. In addition, participants also gather to actively protest the contamination of our waters by corporate actors like Enbridge who use life-threatening gas pipelines, or industrial polluters who dump PFAS and other chemicals into our most precious natural resource. It is a time where all can join in the building of loving communities of folks who want nothing more than to preserve and protect our sacred waters which are key to our survival.

For this purpose, I wanted to create something that could speak to my love for nature, the love of the community, and our shared goal of defending the water. Modeled after a turtle's back, I created and designed a copper water shield. I chose to design my piece after a turtle's shell and used copper for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, the shell contains 13 sections; each representing the 13 moons that cascade across our skies each year. Secondly, the turtle is an aquatic animal that spends its lifetime exploring the depths of our waters largely untouched by mankind. The turtle, therefore, has a deep understanding of our waters and its mystic forces. Additionally, the turtle is known for carrying mud to the surface, aiding in the flourishing of other species that utilize these new landforms. Thus, they are also symbolic of providing pathways for creation and survival.

Copper also has strong metallurgical properties. Its conductivity allows for the flow of various frequencies and energies making it expressive of the idea of interconnection and transfer. In addition, both copper and the turtle are special to women who are also conduits for energy transfer and who provide the foundation for new life. Like the turtle, women gather



*Olivia displays her work at Father Marquette Park in Saint Ignace Michigan. Photo by Shiloh Slomsky.*

mud (prepare the land) to foster survival and bring forth new life from wombs encompassed in water. Together, the turtle and copper speak of the harmony of the cycles of the moons which are intimately related to cycles of birth and rebirth.

Through my work, I sought to bring harmony and enact the properties of interconnectivity. I did so by asking participants at the Water is Life Festival to write the word 'water' or 'love' on the turtle shell in their own language or choose one from a list I created of languages from every corner and crevice of our world I could find. This included everything from mathematical codes, to ancient hieroglyphs, to even the Hobo



Code. By the end of the festival, the Turtle Copper Water Shield had approximately 150 words and symbols representing “love” and “water” in the penmanship of those who stood with us in solidarity. However, while she was painted with these historic imprints, she was far from complete. It would take a few years, and a pandemic before I would finish the piece.

I was asked to contribute a piece for the 2022 Biannual International Indigenous Art Exhibit in Saint Ignace, MI. It was then that I determined it was time for the shield to meet its completion. So after painstakingly adding the necessary words of “love” and “water” from the remaining unwritten languages and adding hundreds of more symbols related to the ideas of harmony and togetherness, I felt the languages of connectivity were complete. Her front now engraved across almost every inch, her back required the same time and patience. With my material of choice, sinew, I hand-sewed her up.

Finally, lacking an accoutrement to make it hangable, I braided basswood cordage, which had spent a frigid winter bathing in a stream. After this process, softened by the water and transformed from wood to twine, it was ready to join the shield. I attached the cord to the edges and she now was able to be hung as pleased.

For the final touch, I intricately and purposely selected the medicines that had been harvested from many seasons behind me to accompany the shield. I wrapped and sealed these medicines in a red cloth pouch, sealing the protection of the shield itself and those who lay their eyes upon her. Time and patience taking its effect, she was now complete and ready to make her debut. She spent some time at the exhibit in St. Ignace, wintering along the waters of the Straits and then, on her way back home to me, she took a moment to once again find her way back at the Water is Life Festival in 2022, where she



*Olivia working on the Turtle Shield at the 2019 Water Is Life Festival in Mackinaw City. Photos by Valerie Jean Blakely*

took center stage. It was here after the concert that she weaved her way through the crowd; and those who were in attendance a few years before, their calligraphy still present, got to gaze upon the shield that they helped me begin all those years ago.

You hear people say the phrase “history always repeats itself” as if this is always a bad thing. But what a privilege it was for this piece of history to return to its origins and to revisit its relationship to the most significant of purposes—to protect our water, to protect our connections to one another, to protect life itself.



# An Understory - for St. Peters

POEM BY BILL WYLIE-KELLERMAN

beneath the high altar, where icons watch, flicker in  
candleflame,  
direct below, and precisely so, a kitchen stovetop flames for  
decades,  
bringing to boil a rotation of hearty soups  
(confess my favorite: Saturday bean with bacon)  
stirred with a steel paddle size enough to oar a canoe.

then bow, step back from the altar...  
beneath the facing pews of a choir stall where evensong  
hangs in air,  
peanut butter by the bucket, that leguminous root, is spread  
openface on the stainless counter,  
bread board of sandwich assembly line.

young Catholic Workers once peered round the doorframe  
to ask, "How far does the line go back?"  
"All the way to Jesus," quips a reply.

which is to say, beneath the table circled  
laden in season with bud or fruitage  
and weekly with gifts of blessed wine and bread  
are tables beside tables, a host akin to Stephen's daily  
distribution;  
street survivors, friends, and angels unaware  
are entertained and gently share  
with all, hospitality as vocation.

just across the parking lot,  
some of those same, made Manna Garden their project,  
turning compost in a wooden bed,  
push seeds and seedlings with thumb into earth  
to partner there with red worms.  
while fungal mycelia whisper and sing of street harvest to  
come.

Once long past, a block further south, May's Creek flowed  
cross Trumbull;  
it was buried by development, though some said it ran still.  
where its route approached the river,  
the rock bed became a rail line  
from beneath Michigan Central Station.  
(now, high above, new windows and desks for engineers  
will plot vehicles for the self-driven).

out front, machines roll by on Michigan Ave.  
long ago beneath it, a forest path was cut by moose and  
mastodons.  
Anishinaabe peoples tread light upon it as the Saulk Trail  
all the way from Waawiyatanong to Shikaakwa  
(as they called the skunky onion marsh, now buried by  
Chicago).  
settlers laid that path with corduroy, cobblestone, and  
macadam,

the better to move wagons and even heavy cannon,  
eventually laying down paving stones, street rail, and asphalt.  
(the rail is buried still, but the paving stones are back in fashion  
for covering things over, with nostalgia quaint).

the church's foundation is firm, as they say,  
going deep and holding space on the famous corner.  
laid down in the old ways, it survived the crash, that one in '29,  
but dozers, cranes, and big wheels shake  
this earth now,  
repipe infrastructure, coincident with cracks and leaks  
and hundred-year climate storms.

claim it even so: underground is a vocation too,  
a necessary and sacred mystery.  
think: Miriam and Moses walking a people out from under  
empire  
on a wilderness way, quenched by the find of an underground  
stream.  
or Elijah, prophet on the run from monarchy,  
fed on oil and a widow's wee cake.  
Jesus slipping the grip of a mob on his hometown bluff,  
off on the lamb to a safe house.  
or Paul, once busted out of prison, fleeing official threats,  
let down by basket through a hole in the city wall.  
early christians navigate catacombs beneath the imperial city,  
make forbidden eucharist by lamplight,  
paint frescos depicting women priests.  
remember Bonhoeffer convening the seminary illegal  
while safe space and conscience shrank down and away.  
or Berrigan ducking the Feds, the law's clawed reach,  
under a Bread and Puppet apostle with a paper mâché head.  
and never forget Harriet turning the underground,  
on coded and hidden rails, into movement,  
with a terminal beside Detroit's river.  
or Lucy and Thornton Blackburn who walked it here  
having escaped in Louisville.  
recaptured as fugitives, they were freed again to Windsor's  
banks  
by Black community, in clever ruse and angry force.  
or our dear Kit Concannon, with  
her desk between the baptismal font and Guadalupe's altar  
spiriting Salvadoreños across the same waters to Canada,  
St Peter's own companion to sister sanctuaries.

let underground be a spiritual home, to live in, live by;  
where Spirit moves, abides, and the company is holy good  
indeed.

*St. Peter's is a radical Christian Church located in Corktown Detroit,  
which is known as a center for mutual aid and its role in providing  
community solidarity against gentrification and neo-liberal capitalism.*





# Activate Your Power 101

## Riverwise community meeting

In 2022, Riverwise was proud to work with Vicki Shah of the Grand River Community Block Club, and #DetroitOversight to create a special edition totally focused upon making local government and civic participation more transparent and accessible. Our Activate Your Power 101 workshop focused on rolling out the edition. We heard from community members about the importance of transparency in local government, heard stories from activists in Detroit doing the work to fight for their communities, and focused on building the kind of community relationships that are so vital to all of our collective liberation. The Special Citizen Empowerment Edition also serves as a workbook anyone can use to educate their community when used in conjunction with Vicki's training manual (available at [riverwisedetroit.org](http://riverwisedetroit.org)). And in 2023 the work will continue!

**(Top)** Riverwise Collective members smile together at the Activate Your Power workshop.

**(Right)** Vicki Shah, president of the Grand River Community Block Club, and founder of #DetroitOversight shows off pages of the Citizens Empowerment Guide

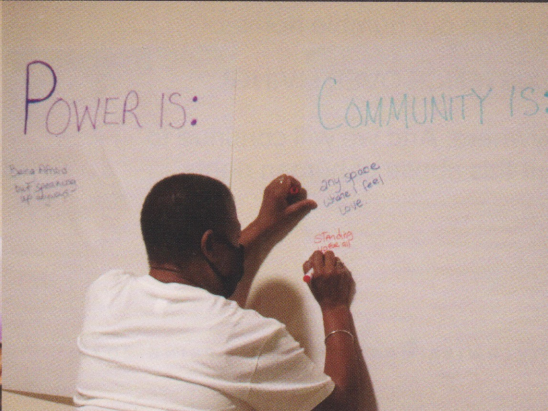
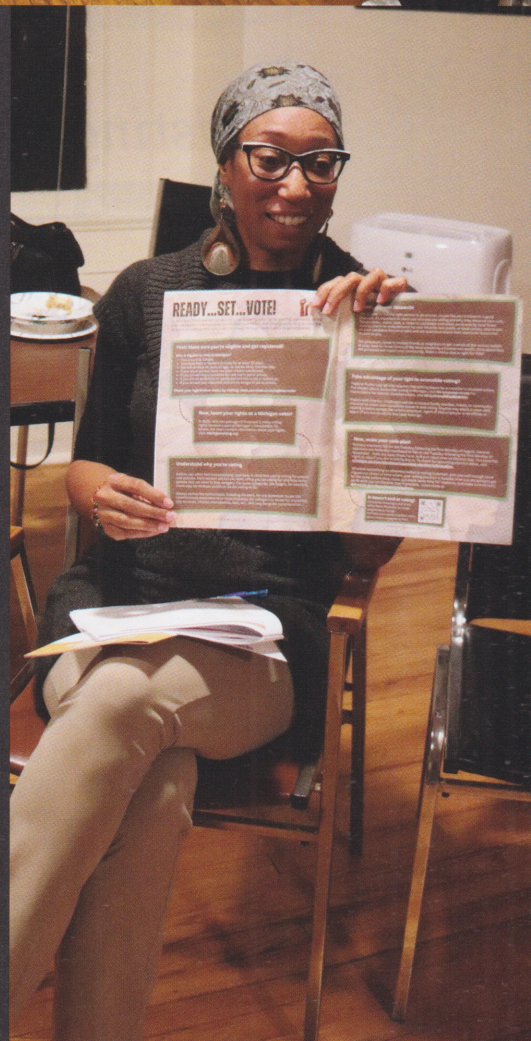
**(Bottom Left)** Michigan Attorney Tonya Myers Phillips joined the collective to discuss her article, featured in the special edition, on the fight to win and secure Detroiters' Right To Council when facing eviction.

**(Bottom Center)** Roslyn Walker adds to our thinking about power and community as a group.

**(Bottom Right)** Tonya Myers Phillips and Cover Artist for the special edition Eno Laget pose with the original artwork.



To host a training for your community, or learn more about how to become a trainer. Reach out to us at [riverwiseinthed@gmail.com](mailto:riverwiseinthed@gmail.com).







## *Existing Over Living*

POEM BY NICOLE HILL

Poverty stirs me awake. I press to the window for a ray of sun to hit my upturned face. I see the cool waters of Spring bubbling up through the street, pooling at the curb and flowing freely as a brook down the street, as if its journey is leading it onto bigger and better things.

I stumble to the bathroom and foolishly turn the faucet to wash my face — nothing flows from the tap because there is nothing to flow. The water has been disconnected. Now I remember! The bill kept getting higher and higher, no matter how much I tried to pay on it.

As I grab another bottle of water to clean my face and teeth, should I dare to take a sip of this liquid gold and force the reaction of normal bodily functions, creating a bigger burden? Here is this room where most find comfort and relief, and seek to feel refreshed.

It has now become part of my place of torment. As it will for the 60,000 households now facing shutoffs due to the moratorium ending, having to experience the ultimate in water torture. **TO TAKE IT AWAY!** City officials should be appalled at their treatment of residents, of fellow human beings.

It strips me of my life force, draws the very essence from my blood and tears me apart slowly as I watch that water flowing freely in the street. Many residents know this pain, knowing we cannot partake of it and cannot afford to invite it into our humble homes.

I woke up this morning to **EXISTENCE OVER LIVING!**

But I'm still here. I'm not going anywhere. And we will continue to fight. We will continue to call out this abuse of human rights.



Photos of Nicole Hill by Valerie Jean Blakeley





# Will Michigan become a Sanctuary State for Reproductive Freedom?

by darien hunter golston

Protestors gather in front of the Theodore Levin Courthouse in Detroit after the overturning of Roe Vs. Wade by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2022. Photos by Megan Douglass.

On June 24th, 2022, the United States Supreme Court ruled against constitutional protections for the right to receive an abortion.<sup>1</sup> This ruling has massive implications for bodily autonomy in this country as it sets a precedent that we are no longer guaranteed privacy in making reproductive decisions. Nearly overnight, clinics nationwide were forced to close their doors in the face of trigger bans and increased restrictions, further limiting the options for accessing abortion care in an already sparse network of providers and clinics. Physicians and patients alike are now facing criminal and civil penalties simply for their proximity to abortion care services. However, the unprecedented leak of the decision in the weeks preceding the ruling also brought about something incredible. As an abortion doula and sex educator, I witnessed firsthand how the floodgates burst as mutual support and resources poured in. Community networks, abortion funds, reproductive justice

organizers, and healthcare workers all rushed to build infrastructures to protect abortion care access by any means necessary.

Across the country, people hustled to learn at-home abortion management and traded resources for receiving services across state lines - there was a massive collective investment in crafting solutions as the clock to the official ruling ticked down. Abortion pills were shipped out, abortion funds boosted their monetary goals in anticipation of increasing calls, and lawyers filed injunctions to halt trigger bans. But the climate around abortion has been fraught and worsening for years - its legacies extending back further than when the protections were put in place under Roe. So, why has it taken us this long to tackle enshrining the right to reproductive freedom given the constant threats? And what can we learn in Michigan about reaching for the highest standard of care in the wake of these attacks on bodily autonomy?

## Towards #ReproductiveFreedomForAll or To #RestoreRoe

So far, Michigan has responded to the Dobbs decision with Proposal 3, also called Reproductive Freedom For All. This ballot measure which was supported overwhelmingly by Michiganders in the 2022 midterm elections, now enshrines the right to comprehensive reproductive care for all individuals in Michigan's Constitution. The language of the amendment has four key components: (1) Establish new individual rights to reproductive freedom, including the right to make and carry out all decisions about pregnancy, such as prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, contraception, sterilization, abortion, miscarriage management, and infertility; (2) Allow the state to regulate abortion after fetal viability, but not prohibit if medically needed to protect a patient's life or physical or mental health (3) Forbid state discrimination in the enforcement of this right; prohibit prosecution



of an individual, or a person helping a pregnant individual, for exercising rights established by this amendment; (4) Invalidate state laws conflicting with this amendment.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, this is a significant win for the future of reproductive care and rights in Michigan. All individuals with the capacity to carry a pregnancy now have the right to do so regardless of gender identity and cannot face criminalization within the state for pursuing reproductive care. It nullifies the 1931 criminal ban on abortion that was temporarily enjoined but still in place - one that would have instituted a total ban across the state. The labor of the campaign organizers, advocacy groups, and the governor herself made the passage of this landmark decision possible.<sup>3</sup> It took the efforts of canvassers, neighbors, coalitions, families, and friends to have open and transparent conversations about abortion care to pass Proposal 3. Its passage reflects the overwhelming support for a future where accessible abortion care exists for all.

If you drove around Detroit in the weeks leading up to Election day you probably saw the orange and purple yard signs emblazoned with YES ON PROP 3. Many of the posts in support of Prop 3 were accompanied with the slogan #ReproductiveFreedomForAll - however the central campaign slogan of Prop 3 was to 'Restore Roe in Michigan'.<sup>4</sup> But do these two slogans create the same changes? Reproductive justice happens when "all people hav[e] the social, political, and economic power and resources to make healthy decisions about their gender, bodies, sexuality, and families for themselves and their communities."<sup>5</sup> Reproductive justice, therefore, is how we arrive at reproductive freedom. The protections under Roe have never been sufficient to meet the needs of the people most impacted by bans, restrictions, and other barriers to reproductive care. Proposal 3 gives us the skeleton to make reproductive freedom a reality in

Michigan, but it's not yet complete. Legality does not create access to abortion care.

### Beyond Legality: Fighting for Expanded Access

Michigan is the 3rd state in the Midwest to enshrine the right to abortion care and reproductive freedom. Illinois was the first to do so, becoming a sanctuary state for reproductive care in the region in 2019.<sup>6</sup> Minnesota has since followed suit as of January 31st, 2023 with the governor enshrining the "fundamental right" replacing the protections in place from the 1995 Minnesota Supreme Court ruling.<sup>7</sup> Minnesota and Illinois are both rated as states with 'expanded access' to abortion care by the Center for Reproductive Rights. Michigan's rating is at the next tier below as a state where abortion is "protected."<sup>8</sup> There are key factors in the landscape for access in IL & MN that differ from Michigan. Michigan does not have statutory protections in place nor does it require public funding or insurance requirements for abortion care. This is where stopping our efforts at legality harms our chances of achieving reproductive freedom for ALL.

Michigan has to strive to become another state where expanded access is the minimum acceptable outcome toward reproductive freedom. As the legal mechanisms slowly move to shift policies in alignment with the amendment, we must be attentive that these changes reflect the need for reproductive freedom as outlined by the tenets of reproductive

*"We learned from the success of this campaign that when we fight for each other we win."*

justice. Those needs include public funding for abortion care, coverage under state Medicaid, evaluating clinic standards to reflect safety with minimal barriers, and requiring private insurance to cover abortion care in-state. It requires removing unnecessary waiting periods for care and ensuring all legislation that follows continues to address reproductive care for individuals without gendered exclusions that harm transgender and intersex people. For this amendment to matter in a political climate hostile to abortion care and bodily autonomy, we must be bold in our standards for the care we all deserve.

### Imagining Abortion Justice Futures

The passage of Prop 3 demonstrates that Michiganders care about a future where reproductive freedom exists for all statewide. While we have leaped closer to that goal, we are just beginning to see the tangible changes occur for it to be a reality. The barriers in place now must change to reflect what Prop 3 revealed: bodily autonomy must be





a right for all.. If it matters for those who can afford the cost of abortion care, childcare, transportation, and private insurance riders, then it also has to impact the experience of the people for whom that is not true.

Reproductive freedom in Michigan is on its way when a single parent working multiple jobs to support her family can receive abortion care without losing a job or losing money meant to pay for rent and bills. Reproductive freedom happens when a disabled trans man can arrange safe transportation from Medicaid to go to the clinic of his choice, receive care without interrogations, and get his care covered without spending hours advocating with insurance companies. #ReproductiveFreedomforAll is a ways away, but there is hope in the passage of Prop 3. We learned from the success of this campaign that when we fight for each other we win.

## A Plea for the Love of Bodily Autonomy

A cultural shift is underway around reproductive care and abortion in this country. How we think about abortion has to change to craft systems for accessibility to make reproductive freedom a reality. 2022 was a year where one phrase kept returning to the front of my mind: bodily autonomy. Between masking mandates, questionable vaccine distribution, long covid debates, and calls from immunocompromised people for continued safety precautions - we have all had to sit with the question of who decides what is best for us and our bodies. No one who survived the last few years of this pandemic has been able to avoid reflecting on what we owe each other in the name of our collective health and how we protect our agency in making healthcare decisions.

Abortion care and the right to access it safely, securely, and without unnecessary barriers is another frontline in the question of who has the right to bodily autonomy in the

United States. What I loved most about the campaign strategy for Prop 3 was that volunteers were encouraged to talk to people who were already ready to support people who get abortions. It was rooted in an ethic of care - supporting people already prepared to protect the legality of abortion care by exercising their right to vote. A network of mutual support was birthed through this campaign, one that still has a purpose today. I hope we can continue to support each other in the wake of the amendment passage. It is imperative to ensure this is a victory for many and not just for some. In addition, this year is essential to ensuring the rights guaranteed by Prop 3 become realized.

If you are looking for ways to stay involved and informed about policy changes, the landscape for abortion access, and efforts to keep abortion safe, legal, and accessible, you can start by connecting with and supporting these organizations and groups: Mothering Justice, Michigan Coalition for Reproductive Liberation, Michigan Voices, Reclaim MI WIN Fund (SE Michigan), YWCA Kalamazoo Reproductive Health Fund, Midwest Access Coalition, Chicago Abortion Fund, National Network of Abortion Funds, Center for Reproductive Rights, or volunteer with local clinic escorts like Gamp Camp (@gampcampescorts on Instagram).



Links to groups named:

<https://www.motheringjustice.org/>  
<https://www.michiganvoices.org/>  
<https://www.ywcakalamazoo.org/what-we-do/advocacy-systems-change/reproductive-health-fund>  
<https://reclaimproject.org/abortion-funding/>  
<https://abortionfunds.org>  
<https://reproductiverights.org/>  
<https://www.midwestaccesscoalition.org>  
<https://www.chicagoabortionfund.org>  
<https://instagram.com/gampcampescorts>  
[https://instagram.com/reproductive\\_liberation\\_mi](https://instagram.com/reproductive_liberation_mi)

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Harmon, Stephanie. "U.S. Supreme Court Takes Away the Constitutional Right to Abortion." Center for Reproductive Rights, 6 July 2022, <https://reproductiverights.org/supreme-court-takes-away-right-to-abortion/>.

<sup>2</sup>Ballot Proposal 3 of 2022 - House.mi.gov. [https://www.house.mi.gov/hfa/PDF/Alpha/Ballot\\_Proposal\\_3\\_of\\_2022.pdf](https://www.house.mi.gov/hfa/PDF/Alpha/Ballot_Proposal_3_of_2022.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>"Governor Whitmer Signs Executive Directive Affirming Reproductive Freedoms." SOM - State of Michigan, 14 Dec. 2022, <https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/news/press-releases/2022/12/14/governor-whitmer-signs-executive-directive-affirming-reproductive-freedoms>.

<sup>4</sup>Reproductive Freedom for All's (@Mireprofreedom) Instagram Profile <https://www.instagram.com/mireprofreedom/>.

<sup>5</sup>"What Is Reproductive Justice?" Forward Together, 19 July 2019, <https://forwardtogether.org/what-is-reproductive-justice/>.

<sup>6</sup>775 Ill. COMP. STAT. 55/1-15.

<sup>7</sup>Kashiwagi, Sydney. "Minnesota Governor Signs Bill Codifying 'Fundamental Right' to Abortion into Law | CNN Politics." CNN, Cable News Network, 1 Feb. 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/31/politics/minnesota-abortion-access/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup>"Abortion Laws by State - Interactive Map." Center for Reproductive Rights, 6 Jan. 2023, <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>.

**darien hunter golston** (as written; pronouns - ey/em/eir or d) is an earthkeeper, land steward, artist, and full spectrum doula living between Waawiyatanong and Zhigaagoong (Detroit & Chicago, respectively). For em, land stewardship is about laboring towards Black liberation by nurturing kinship between people and the land. darien grows flowers, herbs, and textiles in support of achieving reproductive justice. d arrived at earthkeeping in 2020 following a decades-long journey working in sexuality education, domestic violence intervention services, abortion justice campaigns, police/prison abolition, and through struggles for bodily autonomy across the Midwest.

darien enjoys spending eir outside of work cooking, roller skating, playing in the water, and upcycling materials for the crafting project of the moment. Writing is a quiet passion for d that ey is flexing through sharing this piece with Riverwise. It is an honor to contribute to a publication that uplifts the people's power in Detroit.





My series (Trans)caples is about looking at the transgender experience through a different lens. By using trees in place of the trans body, I illustrate both the growth and change that exists in the trans experience. Each image in this series was photographed on Belle Isle in Detroit, MI and is created using a historical photographic process with a modern twist. The layering technique involved in this process represents the layers of change required in the trans experience to become your authentic self. Ultimately, (Trans)caples is an example of a self-portrait through the technique used to create the photograph rather than the image subject itself.





**Evan Lockhart** is a professional artist, photographer, and educator whose photographic illustrations have been exhibited nationally. As a 17-year veteran photographer, Lockhart obtained his MFA in photography from Columbus College of Art and Design. His work focuses on the exploration of gender and race dichotomies through mixed-media photography, traditional processes, and audio-journalism. A former high school arts educator, Lockhart was awarded the National Teacher's Medal from the Scholastic Art Awards in 2020. He currently holds the position of Outreach Manager in the College for Creative Studies' Office for Institutional Equity and Inclusion where he oversees outreach to tri-county K-12 institutions. A 2022 Applebaum Artist-in-Residence, Lockhart's current work explores the gendering of landscapes through the transgender gaze.



# I Know Women

POEM BY QUINITA EDMONIA GOOD

I know women  
who are tall women,  
even while sleeping  
their spirits rise to the occasion;

I know women  
with mountainous cheekbones  
that serve as steeples  
for the light of her eyes  
and the history she's never seen,  
I've sensed that Nefertiti  
might be immortal;

Women  
as dark as tropical forests,  
as soft as whispers,  
as light as summer rain,  
and as colorful as intimacy,  
I know mosaic women;

I know women  
who love for the sake of loving  
and being loved,  
hearts and honey melting,  
and children being born;

I know women  
who don't contain their femininity  
in the cross of the legs  
and "no"  
when they mean "Yes!"  
Rather, it is expressed  
in the lull of contemplation,  
and the finale of decisiveness;

Women  
who've kissed the wounds of men  
who've fought on her behalf,  
pushing smiles in front of tears;

I know women  
who've used a .45  
when it was absolutely necessary,  
a German luger  
when it called for being revolutionary,  
I know warrior women;

I know women  
with big, thick-assed muscles in her thighs  
from marching  
20 miles to racist schools,  
and 40 miles to storefront churches  
where sanctified saints  
heal engraved wounds,  
building pyramids of hope  
as she travels;

Women  
who dance at funerals  
and cry the bugles of patience' end  
at weddings and graduations;

These sisters choose  
the men they want,  
groove the men they want,  
they want love,  
I know women;

Whose spindly fingers  
have crocheted potholders,  
picnics, and national treaties;

Women  
who've mined barren hopes  
for an ounce of indication  
that tomorrow  
might be better than today;

I know  
I know these women  
who've taught me  
what it means  
to be  
a WOMAN!



Quinita Edmonia Good, smiling. She has darker skin and black hair, and is wearing bright blue earrings and a matching-color shirt.

**Quinita Edmonia Good** is an award-winning journalist and meticulous academic editor. She is a long-time Detroit resident and the mother of one son. Quinita can be found at [qwrites.weebly.com](http://qwrites.weebly.com).



# The Dreams That Called Me Home

POEM BY LYDIA WYLIE-KELLERMAN

I dream of a resting place.  
Systems are crumbling.  
The powers are wreaking havoc.  
The climate is in crisis.  
It is enough to make you weep.  
Enough to make you scream.  
It is enough for bodies to fall down in exhaustion.  
Fall down here. Rest here.  
Let this be a place where we can breathe, heal, and  
hold one another.  
Let the stones receive our silence, our tears, our  
laughter, and our singing.

I dream about the land.  
Wondering what she is whispering to our spirits?  
How can we learn from this ridge in a time of climate  
change?  
I dream of environmental justice organizing,  
retreats on eco-spirituality and the wilderness prophets,  
skill training on canning, permaculture, foraging, and  
cob building.  
I dream of composting toilets, solar power, and pizza  
ovens.

I dream of a garden overflowing with tomatoes and  
basil.  
A garden that feeds the kitchens,  
where the land gets inside of us.

I dream of a place that lights the imagination,  
that takes craft seriously.  
Crafting is a form of resistance,  
an act of soul tending,  
a form of ancestry remembrance,  
and practical survival skills.  
Come make pottery, carve spoons, stitch quilts, and  
weave baskets.

I dream of an intentional community.  
Beloveds who live on this land  
and lean into a vocation of hospitality.  
Sharing rhythms of work, spirituality, and play  
connected with the wider local community.

I dream of a place that is always gathering circles  
to discern the signs of the time.  
In Grace Lee Boggs' words, "What time is it on the  
clock of the world?"  
How do we respond? How do we resist?  
How do we tend to our souls?

I dream of a place where actions are imagined,  
organizing happens,  
and resistance is embodied.  
A place where we ask what does the spirit of  
"picket and pray" mean right now?

I dream of an intergenerational landscape,  
where the children and elders are our teachers.  
A place that takes young folks' dreams seriously.  
But also where we can hold one another in old age,  
love one another,  
and ask what it means to die well.

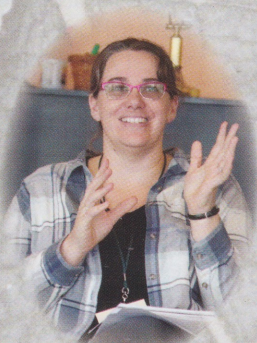
I dream of a place that will continue to welcome LGBTQ folks  
and tell the amazing history that has happened here,  
that will honor queer voices at the forefront of theology.

I dream of a place that does the hard and crucial work of  
racial justice,  
internally within the organization and in our wider work,  
a space that can nurture racial healing.

I dream about ways to fall more in love with the little patch of  
earth  
to be quiet among the trees,  
to be in relationship with the toads and the snakes and the  
deer.  
I want to hide swings and benches deep in the forest.  
I want to build an outdoor chapel tucked away in the stones.

I dream of singing and stories,  
bonfires and sledding,  
instruments playing and bread breaking.  
I dream of births and deaths  
and all the ordinary that lies between.


More than anything, I mean  
to stay awake  
and to love this land.



*Lydia Wylie-Kellerman is a mother, activist and writer formed in Detroit. She is the editor of Geez Magazine. Over the summer, she and her family left Detroit to be the director and caretakers of Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center. She wrote this poem about the dreams she holds for Kirkridge that called her to move to the mountains. Lydia, Erinn, Isaac and Cedar now have two homes: one on a ridge in the Appalachian Mountains and another along the banks of the Detroit River.*

*Photo by Valerie Jean*





# Back Alley Bikes brings year ‘round riding to the Motor City

BY JUSTIN THOMPSON FOR BACK ALLEY BIKES

Photos courtesy of Back Alley Bikes

*Detroit is a bike town. With its flat, often lightly traveled streets, it's bike riding weather all year round. People embrace their bikes, bringing their own flavor and style to them. Detroit bike riders are passionate about riding, not just to get where they need to go, but for the experience of the ride itself. Come summer, bikers are out on their cruisers with the fresh wheel lights on and the speakers bumping. There are obvious places to ride like the Riverwalk, Belle Isle, or the Dequindre Cut, but there are also bike clubs and opportunities to ride in every part of the city. Detroit has a strong and growing bike culture, meeting needs for cheaper transportation and providing joyful alternatives to unpredictable buses or expensive cars.*

Back Alley Bikes (BAB) has long contributed to the development of biking in Detroit. It has operated as a community-based bicycle workshop space and parts warehouse in the Cass Corridor for over 20 years. Working in partnership with organizations across the city, BAB's core mission is to provide cycling education and services with a focus on youth development, sustainable practices, and community access. In recent years BAB programs have donated hundreds of bikes, mostly to children, to the Detroit community. Volunteers and staff prepare used bikes for inexpensive "garage sales" throughout the year, and offer a variety of classes for people of all ages and skill levels to learn more about bike maintenance and repair.

BAB was founded in 2000 by Detroit Summer (a program aimed at re-spiriting, redefining, and re-imagining Detroit from the ground up) as a way to provide transportation to youth participants. Bicycles were used for everything

from hauling garden tools to transporting muralists. Through an initial partnership with the Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corporation (CCNDC), from the beginning the shop has had a community focus, and opened the doors to neighbors so they could fix their bikes or even earn a new one when they completed a basic bike safety and maintenance program. By the summer of 2003, the shop had outgrown its small room in the Detroit Summer youth center. The shop moved to the back alley of the same building, and thus, Back Alley Bikes earned its name. The organization has remained in this location ever since.

BAB gave birth to The Hub, an affiliated full service bike shop. The Hub opened in 2008 in response to community demand and is currently one of only a few shops serving the Cass Corridor neighborhood. As a for-profit business, the Hub is able to help support BAB community programs. The shop mechanics refurbish bikes that have been





donated to Back Alley Bikes for sale, and also offer complete repair and retail services. The Hub also serves as a source for information about what is happening in the bike community in Detroit.

Over the years, BAB has adapted to meet the needs of a changing neighborhood, most recently working through the many challenges involved in keeping operations ongoing during the COVID pandemic, especially as more people found biking to be a good alternative to avoid crowds (and crowded public transportation) and to move around the city in general.

BAB currently hosts a weekly DIY Open Shop, where community members can utilize BAB's space and equipment to maintain their own bikes. During "Open Shop" the workshop is filled with people from around the city working on personal bike projects and helping one another learn to repair their bikes. With a wide variety of inexpensive

used parts and a dedicated group of knowledgeable volunteers, the DIY Open Shop is an invaluable resource for any Detroit bike rider.

This February, BAB organized the 11th Annual Bike the Blizzard fundraising event. Bike the Blizzard takes place over a weekend when people can participate by riding solo or in small groups to raise money for the co-op. It's a great way to support BAB programming. Riders join organized activities throughout the day and participate in a scavenger hunt, and join themed rides. 2022 was the biggest year yet for Bike the Blizzard with 80 riders and over \$22,000 raised!

Whether it's vintage Schwinn, summertime-ready beach cruisers, trick bikes, or commuter hybrids, BAB helps keep the city rolling. You can get involved with BAB by volunteering, participating in classes, offering financial support through tax-deductible contributions, or even by donating bikes or bike parts for reuse. Getting involved at Back

Alley Bikes – as students, teachers, customers, donors, participants, or volunteers – gives cyclists so many ways to contribute to the mission of promoting and developing bicycling here in the Motor City.

The Hub Bike Shop is located at 3611 Cass Ave.

Back Alley Bikes is located around the corner from The Hub, north of Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, in the alley behind the shop.

More information about Bike the Blizzard (including registration information) can be found at [www.bikereg.com/bike-the-blizzard](http://www.bikereg.com/bike-the-blizzard).

Information about all of Back Alley Bikes' programs and special events and about the Hub's services and hours can be found at [backalleybikes.org](http://backalleybikes.org).



# Stewardship as Ownership:

## *Detroit Reuse Collective*

BY DE PETER YI & LAURA MARIE PETERSON,  
WITH AYESHA JEDDY & OWEN SIMS

*Editor's Note: A previous version of this essay was published in Log 54*

### Centering Sustainable Practice in Development

The Detroit Land Bank Authority (DLBA) is the largest landowner in Detroit. It is also one of 120 land banks across the country, created by local governments as public or nonprofit entities that hold abandoned, foreclosed, and tax-delinquent properties for future development. Originally established in 2008, it gained significant agency in 2014 and now controls 80,000 properties. The DLBA has returned around 30,000 properties to private ownership. It is important to note that Detroit residents have long tended to the land, long before the DLBA. According to Tepfirah Rushdan, co-director at Keep Growing Detroit, land ownership has only recently become an increasing necessity for the many residents who planted and invested in gardens on open land. While the DLBA has codified this in part through programs giving first access to land sales for neighboring residents and community partners, they've also faced criticism for their perceived favoritism of developers.

As architects who are committed to the idea of sustainability and reuse in architectural design, part of our mission is to reimagine how those in our profession can contribute to building equity into the repurposing of existing structures, and to bring those ideas to life. With this in mind, we spoke to seven groups across Detroit representing the voices of resident landowners, urban farmers, community organizers, and city officials: a cacophony which reveals the various visions shaping Detroit's future. Rather than upholding the forces of downtown development, we record here stories of growth around stewardship as a form of ownership. In addition, we discuss our own work to create accessible architecture workshops we call "Build A Chair, Re-Frame A Home" that were born both out of these conversations and our fundamental belief that our collective practices surrounding the built environment must reflect our principles of mutual aid and community connection as key to growing thriving and equitable social spaces..

*Participants in action at the Build a Chair = Reframe a House workshop, Detroit Reuse Collective.*





## A City That Feeds Itself, Frees Itself

The growing pace of change in Detroit is compounded by the magnitude of its land. Spread over 139 square miles, the city is large enough to fit six Manhattans. Detroit's politicians and businessmen like to tout their influence on this land through equally superlative figures. Since the current mayor, Mike Duggan, was elected in 2014, his administration has taken pride in tearing down over 20,000 vacant buildings. And in 2013, businessman John Hantz purchased more than 1,500 lots from the City of Detroit at 350 dollars per lot with the intention of maintaining the land as tree farms, but later sold around 150 of the lots for over 2.8 million dollars. However, a different form of organizing land use around cultivation has a rich past and flourishing future in Detroit: the urban garden and farm.

Across Detroit, people have cultivated images of the city that sharply contrast with downtown development. For example, in Islandview on the east side, the nonprofit Peace Tree Parks is putting finishing touches on a 42-foot geodesic dome harboring all-season planting beds and a passive aquaponics pond. Four miles to the west in Chadsey Condon, eight friends have planted a field of saplings on nine lots, establishing a nature park informally referred to as "the Land." And all across the city, people are stripping apart wood laths and peeling up floorboards to renovate structures they purchased from the DLBA into future homes and businesses. These efforts are advanced through shared networks and resources that residents have created in their interactions with the DLBA and with each other.

"To grow a garden is to grow a community!" proclaimed Dr. Shea Howell, a local Detroit activist who is on the board of the Boggs Center, leaving us with an indelible image of nature as critical to place-based, people-centered alternatives to development. Expanding far beyond the individual hobbyist

pursuit, the urban garden in Detroit is a community enterprise that provides sustenance to residents and financial support to those who make long-term commitments to the land. In a separate conversation, Marc Peeples of Liberated Farms provided a grounded example of this sentiment: his agricultural initiatives double as educational programs for youth, imparting lessons of responsibility and patience that are as essential to growing crops as to life in general.

Detroit residents are a part of the vanguard for starting urban gardens and farms, maintaining nearly 1,500 of them in the city today. This critical mass has led to the creation of networks like the Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund, which has supported 30 Black farmers in obtaining land ownership. On the other hand, the potential for these gardens and farms to provide sustenance at a larger scale has galvanized organizations seeking to expand food security, including Keep Growing Detroit, whose mission is to help cultivate Detroit into a food sovereign city. When we asked about the greatest successes by community activist organizations in Detroit, Dr. Howell brought up the creation of the Detroit Food Policy Council, a format for both representatives from the city's food system and city officials to sit at the same table to influence food security policy. Before our conversation came to an end she shared one more memorable quip, "A city that feeds itself, frees itself." This time, instead of an aphorism describing Detroit's past and present, it is a tangible vision to strive for in the near future.

### Companion Planting and Other Kinships

In November 2020 eight friends pooled together finances to purchase a tract of nine lots from the DLBA in the Chadsey Condon neighborhood. They call this space, "the Land." The group closely observed the layers of natural growth on the land that have merged with the remnants of past construction. They located areas where they could bring in

new plantings and supporting structures that would contribute to the site's ecosystems.. These efforts coalesced into a mission: to steward the lots as a nature park, even as the city around it changes.

On a walk through "the Land", Nick George, one of its owners and stewards, cautioned us to avoid stepping on the small pink flags scattered around the area, each guarding one of the hundred tree saplings the group had planted a few weeks earlier. Nick pointed out each and every species of plant with great enthusiasm, and described the critical role they play on "the Land." Clusters of Michigan wildflowers provide sustenance for bees that in turn pollinate a neighbor's urban farm. A large indentation near the center of the site doubles as a bog, where water-loving plants are already thriving. A small yet mighty grove of old-growth deciduous trees at the north end shades conifer saplings, providing respite from the scorching summer sun. These efforts of interspecies care by design find parallel with the practice of companion planting used by gardeners.

### Speak of Land Differently

An essential tool deployed by land stewards to advance their goals is the use of language. The words we use can empower and connect as much as they can discriminate and divide. In a conversation with DLBA officials, they spoke of efforts to guide residents through land acquisition, but also acknowledged that a large hurdle is created by unfamiliarity with the bureaucratic language of property development. Global Detroit addresses this issue for new immigrants and has guided people through the process of purchasing homes in Southwest Detroit. Liberated Farms addresses a similar hurdle for the next generation of Detroiters, offering educational programs for youth on building proficiency in the language of property, and even giving the original members of its apprenticeship program a 25% stake in the farm's crops and land.





Peace Tree Parks' geodesic dome in Islandview, Detroit, 2021. Photo by De Peter Yi.

## Land as a Social Unit/Architecture as Activator

When land acquisition models shift from the individual to the collective, the use of land can follow suit to take on a social role. In using the term social, we are referring to the conception of land as a tool through which we establish our relationships with each other. “We have been giving away the food that we produce since 2015,” said Eric and Brianna Andrews with little fanfare as we toured the site of their latest urban farm. Their nonprofit Peace Tree Parks is one of many organizations we spoke to that have oriented privately-owned land purchased from the DLBA Community Partnership program for using land for collective benefits. Organizations can acquire properties at a discount. Peace Tree Parks has purchased and converted eleven lots.

“People stop by all the time just out of curiosity. The structure has drawn new attention to our cause,” said Eric as we stepped into the warmth of Peace Tree Parks’ prismatic, polycarbonate-coated geodesic dome. On a frigid morning in early November, the dome was abuzz with activity. Neighbors toured the structure as a group of volunteers prepared the floor of the dome for planter boxes that will soon sprout peppers, cucumbers, and tomatoes. The structure, prefabricated as a kit-of-parts by a Colorado-based company called Growing Spaces,

was reassembled on the site by Eric, Brianna, and a team of volunteers in the span of just a few short months. The dome will fulfill their vision for an all-season greenhouse that extends their growing capacity five times the produce yield per harvest and act as a distribution center in the heart of the city. Even before all of these benefits have materialized, the presence of the dome has created another advantage for Peace Tree Parks: it has aligned the organization’s mission with a memorable image. Indeed, the circular nature of the dome embodies the strength & resilience of entities created without rigid borders.

## Let There be Uncut Lawns!

Peace Tree Parks’ dome demonstrates that imaging and communicating models of land use is vital to the success of alternative and unconventional approaches. However, the city’s idealized image of land stewardship can sometimes contradict the realities of what people are putting in practice.

Conventional ideas held by city bureaucrats often counter goals pursued by land stewards. Residents have looked beyond uncut lawns, seeing possibilities of unfettered natural, agricultural, and community growth. If the stages and cycles of such growth can take precedence over normalized assumptions of productivity, then there is an opportunity to reimagine

what healthy urban environments could look like.

## Making Time

As we have become accustomed to living within societies fixated on economic growth, speeding up often means progress and slowing down is equated with decline. Though profit-driven land development in Detroit is speeding up in the hands of real estate investors and speculators, creating ways to slow down enables a greater number of residents to take part in shaping the city’s future.

Alterations of time already underpin land transactions conducted in the city. The DLBA gives city residents exclusive access to purchase a side lot adjacent to their own within 180 days of it becoming available before extending the offer to the wider community. In East Davison Village, community partners worked with the DLBA to establish a period of specialized purchasing for neighborhood residents. However, with the DLBA’s policies in constant transition, alterations of time in favor of residents and land stewards are fleeting. For many people, like Marc Peeples, going through the DLBA to obtain land is a time-consuming endeavor. With the goal of equitable access in mind, the city should actively reshape time and continue offering moments of respite from the relentless pace of the market for residents to achieve their goals. In this case, slowing down becomes a necessary antidote to the hangovers of speeding up.

## The Future is Reuse

Based on the stories we’ve heard, a question swirls in our minds: what images of the city’s future allow its residents to find common ground? One shared thread we’ve identified is that Detroit’s future is built on a culture of stewardship, long sustained by people with a deep understanding of the city’s existing material and social conditions. These residents see the city’s future growth as part of a longer term process of renewal. For example, Nick George explained that a function of “the Land” is to remediate the soil contaminated from the demolished homes left



on site to renew it for future use. Yet, the city's definition of progress in recent history continues to be measured by the amount of material demolished. The eradication of tens of thousands of structures in Detroit under the objective of "blight removal" has done little to provide housing solutions for the residents that have been displaced. And throughout the history of Detroit and cities across the US, demolition has been synonymous with segregation and division.

"The best thing you can do is build things up," countered Dr. Howell as she discussed the current city administration's penchant for knocking things down. In the eyes of many, the structures that remain standing on vacated land across the city are full of potential energy. At the time of writing this essay, there are more structures undergoing renovation than the total number that have ever in the DLBA's 14-year history. Self-organized social media groups of residents sharing resources for renovating properties have swelled to thousands of members. Furthermore, the DLBA's sales are outpacing their acquisitions, a harbinger for more seismic changes to come as the number of properties they hold dwindles.

As homes are being purchased at record pace and as Detroiters and newcomers alike seek to remain and be a part of the city's future, reducing barriers to land acquisition and home renovation, to foment community stewardship is essential. It is within this milieu where our idea for the Build-A-Chair, Re-Frame a Home workshops came about. Much like providing education around the language of home and property ownership can

be demystifying, so to can providing basic skills and knowledge about the actual processes involved in renovating and rebuilding a property.

Our process is simple. Through an intensive (and fun!) hands-on day-long training, participants are guided through building a "chair" which represents all of the essential components of a standard home. As you build the base for the chair, you learn the basics for laying a foundation for a home. As you build the back of the chair you learn how to create rafters, weatherize, and lay shingles for a roof. As you build the sides of the chair, you learn how to build walls in a home, and so on. In addition, we walk participants through each tool they are using, and provide tips and tricks for making the work less cumbersome. Finally, we provide resources and links to DLBA representatives, other organizations providing support to homeowners in the city, and information that assists with next steps. By the end of the day, people who may have never even used a hammer before leave feeling energized, empowered, and more in control of what can often feel like a daunting process.

We believe that in this way, we not only provide community members with the opportunity to gain important skills, but also spark organic connections and relationships among the participants that will last beyond our workshops (we often witness friendships blossom during the day!) These workshops we believe are firmly in line with the idea of slowing down, centering the process and the people before profit, and reintroducing connection and care into our ideologies about the spaces and places we inhabit.

In anticipation of the future, could the DLBA transition from an organization that holds and sells property to a public entity that supports stewardship and reuse? Existing initiatives can be reoriented to realize this goal. Rather than direct funding toward demolition, the City of Detroit could hire residents to disassemble, salvage, and repurpose the materials of vacant properties, and renovate

abandoned homes into new housing stock. In turn, this would train residents in skills of rebuilding that contribute to long-term cycles of maintenance and growth, cementing a culture of stewardship that has long been critical to Detroit's character as a movement city, and that will continue to be important in realizing equitable transformation in the long run.

**De Peter Yi and Laura Marie Peterson**  
co-direct 1+1+ Architects. **Ayesha Jeddy**  
and **Owen Sims** are studying architecture  
and urban technology, respectively, at the  
University of Michigan.

<sup>1</sup>While the number is always changing, the DLBA holds 79,626 properties as of August 2021. James David Dickson, "Detroit Puts First Batch of Houses Stabilized with Bond Funds up for Auction," *Detroit News*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/detroit-city/2021/08/20/detroit-secures-auctions-off-first-batch-proposal-n-homes/8194220002/>.

<sup>2</sup>See City of Detroit, "Detroit Demolition Department," <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/detroit-demolition-department>.

<sup>3</sup>The City of Detroit does require city council approval for any DLBA sales to a buyer exceeding nine properties over a 12 month period. Hantz's purchase had the support of the Detroit City Council and the mayor at the time, Dave Bing.

<sup>4</sup>The recent movement of urban farming got its start in Detroit through the 1975 Farm-A-Lot initiative which helped Detroiters grow food during economic hardship. It was revitalized in the 1980s by the "Gardening Angels," a group of mostly elderly African American women who stewarded gardens and taught youth how to tend to crops and land.

<sup>5</sup>See Dan Carmody, "A Growing City: Detroit's Rich Tradition of Urban Gardens Plays an Important Role in the City's Resurgence," *Urbanland*, March 19, 2018.

<sup>6</sup>Throughout the history of the US, there have been efforts to legally and illegally segregate where people live, including racial covenants that prevented people of color from purchasing land and homes in certain neighborhoods. Outdated clauses in homeowner contracts still bear racist language.

<sup>7</sup>For more information about the side lot program, see Detroit Land Bank Authority, "Side Lots Sales," <https://buildingdetroit.org/sidelots/>.

<sup>8</sup>See Andrew Herscher, "Blight,' Spatial Racism, and the Demolition of the Housing Question in Detroit," in *Housing After the Neoliberal Turn: International Case Studies*, ed. Jesko Fezer, et al. (Leipzig: Spector, 2015), 39–46.

<sup>9</sup>See Nithin Vejendla, "Freeways Are Detroit's Most Enduring Monuments to Racism. Let's Excise Them. | Opinion," *Detroit Free Press*, July 5, 2020, <https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/contributors/2020/07/05/detroit-freeways-racism-segregation-white-flight/5366081002/>. "Planners routed Detroit's freeways through predominantly Black communities. The Chrysler Freeway blasted through Paradise Valley and Black Bottom, destroying a vibrant Black business and entertainment district that contained some of the African-American community's most important institutions.



The chair constructed by participants for the Build a Chair = Reframe a House workshop, Detroit Reuse Collective.



# Compassion, Solidarity, Care:

## *Detroit-Area Youth Respond to the Pandemic*

BY JULIA CUNEO



“Oh my god I can’t believe my teacher just...”

“Y’all see this tweet from the superintendent?”

“When’s winter break start?”

“They just changed up my schedule and I hate it.”

“Why’s the textbook say this? We all know that’s not true.”

As the strategic coordinator (a term students invented to subvert the “executive director” title) for a grassroots youth-run activist organization, Detroit Area Youth Uniting Michigan (DAYUM) my phone constantly buzzes with student concerns, observations, and complaints in our group chat. We support students who want to lead campaigns in their schools to change policies or hold school leaders accountable to their students. These issues range from economic justice to climate change to anti-racism — anything that directly impacts youth. Which is everything.

My job is to help students identify which of these issues are systemic and which are personal. Then we create campaigns to make the changes they want to see. I bring in tools gleaned from my background in community organizing. I connect them to partner organizations that work on similar issues and can support us with shaping our demands. My most important role however is to acknowledge and validate their feelings, remind them that the injustices they experience at school aren’t OK, and that they

deserve better.

A group of about 10 high school students and I created DAYUM in 2018, after organizing the Detroit branch of the March for Our Lives. We were not funded or paid in the beginning, but we felt that we *needed* a youth-run organization that wasn’t focused on youth development, electoral politics, or community service. We wanted a base-building organization, one whose only mission is to support youth organizing. That means I go where they want to go — if they’re frustrated with the attendance policy, we work on that. If they react to gun violence in the news, we work on that.

The premise of our work is that young people are leaders today; that they can collectively leverage their power to make change in the present, not just in the future. Like community organizers, our campaigns start with student concerns. Then, we research and analyze before we develop our demands and choose a target. All of this builds on what I see as the natural tendency of young people to question institutions and buck the system.

At the beginning of 2020 we were

DAYUM members and interns, August 2022



working on a statewide lobby day uniting young people across Michigan to meet with legislators in our state capital. We called it “Youth Take Over Lansing.”

But in March of 2020, my phone went silent. School had been canceled, nobody knew yet for how long. Most of the young people in our organization were in shock, bouncing between fear for their parents who were essential workers and anxiety for the statuses of their grades, prom, friends, graduation.

And when the kids stopped chattering in the group chat, I felt rudderless. We couldn’t meet in person, where I would usually feed them pizza, we’d joke around, and eventually an idea would surface for a new project or campaign. That is how we’d operated. What else could we do?

I tried messaging in the group chat.



"Anyone want to do an Instagram live?"

Crickets.

"Want to meet virtually this weekend?"

Nothing.



And then I broke a grown-up rule. I did something other adults working in education don't get to do, because it's (probably rightly) considered

inappropriate. I texted them. One at a time, individually. I sent more than 15 texts. All I said was "How are you doing?"

I realized that, despite our close relationships, I hadn't asked them that yet, not individually. In fact, I don't think *anyone* had asked them that, at the time.

I also knew I had to keep it short. The last thing they needed was another paragraph of text on their screen telling them everything we should be doing. I made a choice to focus on them, on their wellness, because as a youth-run organization we could. And, it turned out, we had to.

Slowly, one at a time, sometimes at two in the morning, I started to get responses.

"Terrible. I can't sleep."

"I'm OK, but I think I'm failing all my classes."

"I don't even know what I'm supposed to be doing."

"My mom is sick, I'm stuck in my room all day."



"I'm working all the time, I'm exhausted."

These young people opening up to me about their mental health made me realize something: My adult priorities (keep our organization running, stay on track to spend our

grants, grow our base so we don't disappear) were completely out of sync with how young people were experiencing the pandemic. My friends in their 20s were having trouble, everyone was, but these kids were deeply struggling. Their silence in the group chat was just one signal of how badly they needed help.

Our organization has come to specialize in youth-led political campaigns, but when it became obvious how badly the pandemic was impacting young people, we pivoted to focus entirely on mental health — first for our members, and then rippling outward. When I asked what they needed, the young people tentatively requested virtual movie and game nights. "I just want to see my friends," they said. "I miss y'all."

After a few weeks of consistent social events — at the same time every week, no matter what else was going on in the world — someone mentioned they were bored at home. "I ran out of things to do weeks ago. Now I just stare at my phone." We brainstormed ideas for outlets that were accessible to young people without transportation or income — coloring, kitchen science experiments, going for a walk.

I don't remember who suggested it first, but these are community leaders, who never want to keep a good idea to themselves. Our self-care activities inevitably led us to a new project. "What if we make care kits that we can deliver, like to people's porches?" To my surprise, the young people *jumped* on this idea — the group chat was busy again. They didn't just want to entertain themselves, they wanted to take care of others.

"What if we gave them art supplies?"

"Could we include PPE?"

"Does anyone know how to make masks?"

"We should do slime kits!"

"Ooh, stress balls!"

"Card games!"

Our organization rebounded by the end of March with renewed energy and a new mission.

This project eventually became so big that we couldn't do it by ourselves. We reached out to other local youth programs to join us in this work and together we formed the Covid Youth Taskforce. We distributed more than 200 care kits, with young people themselves fundraising, shopping, creating, and delivering the kits to their peers. While administrators wrung their hands over "learning loss" and test scores, constructing a narrative of young people languishing at home without school to whip them into shape, these young people were applying themselves to a whole new set of circumstances — *learning* how to respond to crises with compassion, solidarity, and care.

By the time school administrators rallied themselves to take charge, we'd been organizing together for months and grown threefold as an organization. We were ready for the schools' authoritarian response. Almost immediately, we released the Online Learning Bill of Rights, a list of student-centered expectations for online schooling (see <https://alliedmedia.org/post/online-learning-bill-of-rights>). Students had rallied to take care of each other through one of the hardest periods in their or their parents' lives, they weren't about to accept the harsh, controlling conditions imposed by online school lying down.

The solidarity we'd built across school districts allowed students to recognize and question the inequality of the online learning plans. Why did students in Detroit need to be on screen eight hours a day but their friends in suburban schools had only three hours of synchronous class a day? Why were students being "dress-coded" while sitting in their own bedrooms? It turned out that it was our mutual



aid and emergency response projects that laid the groundwork for structural demands on the system.

Self-evaluation and reflection is an integral part of DAYUM's practice, it's how we continue to learn from our organizing in a never ending cycle. In processing these years of pandemic response work together, the young leaders of DAYUM highlighted three important lessons that will inform how we organize going forward. First, as we saw from schools in the spring of 2020, it's often their own rules and priorities that block traditional institutions from reacting quickly or effectively to crisis moments. Schools in Michigan could have done exactly what we did, only at a *much* larger scale. Many didn't, because they did not have the imagination, or governmental support to use resources earmarked for "school" in a different way. Even if it's deeply educational, even if it's lifesaving.

Second, just because these traditional institutions refuse to act doesn't mean those of us in harm's way can't. The young leaders noted that we were most successful when we made a

purposeful choice to behave as though the government, the adult world, was not going to do much (if anything) to help young people. And in fact, when school administrations did reorient themselves, it was not to provide relief or support but to demand missing homework, prepare for standardized tests, and push students (and teachers) to go "back to normal."

The third and most important lesson these high school students taught me is that when things seem impossibly hard, the best and easiest way forward is often to reach out to someone else. Inspired by

*"I don't believe in Michigan, but I do believe in Michigan youth. Why do we believe in ourselves? Because who else is going to?"*



*Gifts and supplies sent in a COVID care package for youth across Metro Detroit*

radical organizers who have used mutual aid as a tactic in the past, such as the Black Panthers' Free Breakfast Program and the water warriors here in Detroit, they were the first to check on each other, to share resources, and to empathize with their differing struggles. Even from the bottom of what felt like an endless pit of despair, their relationships made them stronger together.

We often think we have to choose between "individual" and "systemic" responses to crises. DAYUM youth have proven that this binary, like many binaries Gen Z is challenging, is not as simple as it at first seems. It was our seemingly "individual" efforts that built the foundation for systemic demands. And it was our systemic critiques of schooling that allowed us to deprioritize academics at the height of the crisis.

It's important to take stock of what we've learned from the unprecedented disruption in schooling brought about by Covid. As our world faces increasing disasters from capitalism, climate change, and white supremacy, we must ask ourselves how we will respond next time. What if our schools had taken a lesson

from their students and prioritized rest, resource sharing, safety, and relationships?

Just as workers need unions, young people need to be organizing as students to make collective demands on the system as well as to meet their needs in an emergency. Adults can help by validating their feelings, helping them to analyze their concerns, and acting in solidarity as they develop and push forward demands. In short, we need to be organizers, and we need to see young people as organizers too.

In our 2022 State of the Youth address, DAYUM's chair responded to Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's appeal to "Believe in Michigan." She challenged Gov. Whitmer to do more to support young people, to earn their trust. Reflecting on two years of youth-led pandemic response work and advocacy she said, "I don't believe in Michigan, but I do believe in Michigan youth. Why do we believe in ourselves? Because who else is going to?"

**Julia Cuneo** (she/they) is the Strategic Coordinator for Detroit Area Youth Uniting Michigan (DAYUM) where they seek to resist the imbalance of power that exists in schools between administration and students. They have been a youth organizer for over 6 years and helped student leaders co-found DAYUM in 2018. To learn about Julia's youth organizing and adult allyship training go to [juliacuneo.com](http://juliacuneo.com).



# 1924/2022

POEM BY DR. JOHN TELFORD

"Separate and unequal"  
Has an evil sequel:  
The devilish creation  
Of racial segregation  
Is abject subjugation  
And clear discrimination.  
So found 'Brown  
Versus Board of Education.'  
True reconciliation  
And total integration  
Are needed in our nation.  
Thenceforth may we escape  
The fatal final fate  
Of God's annihilation.

*Dr. John Telford is a lifelong educator. He is the DPSCD poet-in-residence at Frederick Douglass Academy for Young Men and professor of poetry for the Michigan Chapter of the Di Medici Society. He is also a columnist, who writes 'The Poet's Corner' for The Downtown Detroit Monitor. He was awarded Prize Poet by the Sharon Creative Arts Association in 1966.*

## Ready, Set, Listen!

Check Out The Riverwise Podcast!



*Dr. Reinhardt speaking and playing with his band in 2022 at the Pipe Out Paddle Up Flotilla event held at the foot of the Mackinac Bridge during the annual Water is Life festival in Mackinaw City, Michigan.*

Dr. Martin Reinhardt is president of the Michigan Indian Education Council, lead singer, and songwriter for the band Waawiyayaa (The Circle). He is a tenured professor of Native American Studies at Northern Michigan University, and an Anishinaabe Ojibway citizen of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians from Michigan.

He joined the Riverwise Podcast to discuss how to decolonize food and how to live healthy and grounded with an Indigenous diet. We discuss what it means to follow an Indigenous diet and how these have been shaped by culture, history, and the environment. Learn how decolonizing food is a part of undoing harm caused by colonialism and restoring the autonomy and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples over their food systems.



Listen at [riverwisedetroit.org/podcast](https://riverwisedetroit.org/podcast) or scan the QR code with your smartphone camera to be taken to the link!



# Cold Turkey

*A retrospective of the author's last six years, retiring from community activism in Detroit and beyond*

POEM BY OWÓLABI ABOYADE

1.  
Remembering stomping feet on stages moved the world  
Overturned tables, ours  
Rhymed with power  
I miss those rhythms and how we spit.  
Withdrawal from activist lines,  
Community cold turkey  
My soul's journey towards individual radiance  
Awakening from divorce, a shard alone in scattered world  
The weight of everything unsaid

Bright moments that radiate

Silence

Throughout the unknown cosmos  
Being claimed by celestial lineage  
So much beauty, did i share

You were not there for me  
You could not be  
Did i explain my self

To you, or leave a

self  
Among you, or did i share silence  
And leave  
Was i people

Pleasing that entire time

Or putting in that work?

The community stopped being  
Beloved when i didn't feel the love  
The community never stopped being  
It chugged along its rusty, trusted rails  
Without me

2.  
When i was twelve, my kidneys,  
Held too much pain and retired  
From filtering waste  
Held too many silent tears and  
Started a work stoppage, wildcat strike,  
My first Detroit Black  
Activism

When i was twelve, my kidneys,  
Holding it all and me vomiting  
My special sauce  
Putting in that work

In the classroom  
At Cedar Point  
Them 4.0 report cards  
While holding  
Younger siblings  
All the way  
To the emergencies  
That room at Children's Hospital

What i'm saying is  
The community never stopped  
I learned  
It lurched along on rusty, trusted rails

Without me  
With me

Putting in that work,  
My spirit shaking  
Aches for a place  
Where i am held  
Essential

Even if it's in just  
A busy corner of this shattered house  
Hello kidneys,  
A fleeting moment with my son,  
My kidneys,  
A shivering sliver of your heart.

*Photo by Laura Bailey Brandon taken on the North Country Trail in Wilderness State Park (Carp Lake, MI).*



# What We're Reading

**A** *Generation Found: The Journey Continues* continues the work of Marshall's first book *A Generation Found: Precious Pearls of Wisdom*. In the same spirit of highlighting and honoring the work of our elders, and telling their stories through their own voice, this edition spotlights 51 inspirational Black elders ages 77 to 110 from across the U.S. whose lives and actions have had profound impact upon those around them and their communities.

These stories which speak of the work done by these elders to fight for and defend civil rights include those of: Ernest Green, 81, a business executive who as a teen made history as a civil rights activist with Little Rock Nine integrating an Arkansas high school; Ben Johnson, 81, a former Special Assistant to President Bill Clinton and Director of Consumer Programs for President Jimmy Carter; Nobie Mae Hill, 110, a beauty parlor owner in Michigan; Dr. Cledie Taylor, 96, Detroit artist and art gallery owner; Sarah Chambliss, 83, teacher and poet; Jeanne Parnell, 86, New York City retired assistant principal and popular radio talk show host; Wilfred Ussery, 94, a national officer in the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) and San Francisco award-winning architect; Gus Newport, former two-term mayor of Berkeley, CA; retired Air Force Colonel Conway Jones, Jr; Harriet Michel, 80, former President and CEO, National Minority Supplier Development Council and a 1965 Freedom Rider in Alabama; and Paul Cobb, 78, owner and publisher of Post Newsgroup, headquartered in Oakland, CA, which has nine newspaper publications including the Spanish *El Mundo*.

As noted by Marshall, "my goal and objective is to help our children investigate their environment, immediate families, communities, and their broader world family. [I want to] inspire them to ask, "who are our ancestors?", "where do we fit into the narrative?", "what lessons can we carry from our historical experiences into our present and future?" [I want us] all to consider the responsibility of each generation to preserve history. I believe that the knowledge handed down by our beloved elders and ancestors connects us and provides us with a better understanding of the rich culture and tradition that has sustained us from the beginning of time. It is the prayers, blood, sweat, and tears of our elders that have laid the foundation upon which we stand. History documented in our time allows us the opportunity to create the art of caring for those most precious, our elders, our jewels...The crucial message that is provided by our elders is the message of hope, accountability, shared responsibility, and the blueprint to achieve the greatest that we are destined to be."



## A GENERATION FOUND: *The Journey Continues*

A Collection of Interviews and Photographs by Roohee Marshall

**Roohee (Ru-he) Marshall** was born in Natchez, Mississippi. She came from a loving close family who taught her discipline, pride, health consciousness, the importance of community and living a purpose-filled life.

"I grew up in Natchez Mississippi in the 60s and 70s. I was homegrown near the mighty Mississippi River, where pecan trees, fields of sugar cane, honeysuckle and the aroma of sweet scents remain forever in the shadows of my mind. This is a place where the branches of the unshakable oak, hold stories untold as deep and as wide as the Mississippi River. My stories were captured within the heartbeat of unspeakable times. It's a place where the sun gleams, bringing luster to the days, where the stars' glisten and shine".





# MUTUAL AID

## Community Support & Services

- Alternatives for Girls: [alternativesforgirls.org](http://alternativesforgirls.org)
- Back Alley Bikes: [backalleybikes.org](http://backalleybikes.org)
- Black To the Land Coalition: On FB @BlackToTheLandCoalition
- Church of the Messiah: [churchofthemessiahdetroit.org](http://churchofthemessiahdetroit.org)
- Detroit Sex Worker Mutual Aid Fund: [answerdetroit.org](http://answerdetroit.org)
- Eastside Community Network: [ecn-detroit.org](http://ecn-detroit.org)
- Eastside Mutual Aid: [linktr.ee/ESmutualaid](http://linktr.ee/ESmutualaid)
- East Warren Tool Library: [ewarrentoollibrary.myturn.com/library](http://ewarrentoollibrary.myturn.com/library)
- For the People Mutual Aid: [linktr.ee/FTP\\_Detroit](http://linktr.ee/FTP_Detroit)
- Hamtramck Mutual Aid: FB Group @HamtramckMutualAid
- MACC Development: [maccdevelopment.com](http://maccdevelopment.com)
- Mama Akua Community House: On FB @MamaAkuaCommunityHouse
- Metro Detroit Mutual Aid: [detmutualaid.com](http://detmutualaid.com)
- MI Alliance of Timebanks: [mitimebanks.org/join-a-timebank](http://mitimebanks.org/join-a-timebank)
- Michigan Black Mama's Bailout: On FB @MichiganBlackMamasBailOut
- Michigan Mutual Aid Coalition: TW @MichigansMAC
- Motor City Street Dance Academy (MCSDA): On FB @MOTORCITYSDA
- The Mutual Aid Network of Ypsilanti: [ypsimutualaid.org](http://ypsimutualaid.org)
- Oakland County Mutual Aid: [beacons.ai/ocmutualaid](http://beacons.ai/ocmutualaid)
- Peace House Ypsi: [missiona2.org/peace-house-ypsi.html](http://missiona2.org/peace-house-ypsi.html)
- The Washtenaw General Defense Committee: [linktr.ee/washtenawgdc](http://linktr.ee/washtenawgdc)
- Wayne Metro: [waynemetro.org](http://waynemetro.org)

## Food & Water

- Hey Y'all Detroit: On FB @HeyYallDetroit
- Detroit Community Fridge: [linktr.ee/detroitcommunityfridge](http://linktr.ee/detroitcommunityfridge)
- D-Town Farm and Detroit Black Community Food Security Network: [dbcfsn.org](http://dbcfsn.org)
- Feedom Freedom Growers: On FB @FeedomFreedom
- Keep Growing Detroit: [detroitagriculture.net](http://detroitagriculture.net)
- Make Food Not Waste: [makefoodnotwaste.org](http://makefoodnotwaste.org)
- Food As Healing: [foodashealing.com](http://foodashealing.com)
- We The People of Detroit: [wethepeopleofdetroit.com](http://wethepeopleofdetroit.com)
  - For Water: 1-(844)-42-Water
- The People's Water Board: [peopleswaterboard.org](http://peopleswaterboard.org)
- Hydrate Detroit: [hydratedetroit.org](http://hydratedetroit.org)
- Food Not Class: [linktr.ee/foodnotclass](http://linktr.ee/foodnotclass)



# IN MICHIGAN

## Legal/Civic Aid & Direct Action Support

- Coalition For Property Tax Justice: [illegalforeclosures.org](http://illegalforeclosures.org)
- Detroit Black Farmer Land Fund: [detroitblackfarmer.com](http://detroitblackfarmer.com)
- Detroit Eviction Defense: [detroitevictiondefense.net](http://detroitevictiondefense.net)
- Detroit Justice Center: [detroitjustice.org](http://detroitjustice.org)
- Detroit Tenants Association - On FB @DetroitTenantsAssociation
- United Community Housing Coalition: [uchcdetroit.org](http://uchcdetroit.org)
- Michigan Chapter National Lawyers Guild: [michigannlg.org](http://michigannlg.org)
- Moratorium Now: [moratorium-mi.org](http://moratorium-mi.org)
- Rent Party Detroit: [rentpartydetroit.org](http://rentpartydetroit.org)
- Sugar Law Center: [sugarlaw.org/our-work-1](http://sugarlaw.org/our-work-1)
- 313 Care Collective: [313cc.org](http://313cc.org)
- Motor City Mobile Wellness: On IG @mcmw\_detroit

## Informational/Educational Resources

- Birwood House: [birwoodhouse@gmail.com](mailto:birwoodhouse@gmail.com)
- The Boggs Center: [boggscenter.org](http://boggscenter.org)
- The Boggs School: [boggschool.org](http://boggschool.org)
- Detroit Documenters: [detroit.documenters.org](http://detroit.documenters.org); On TW @DetDocumenters
- Detroit Summer: [boggscenter.org/detroitsummer](http://boggscenter.org/detroitsummer)
- Eastside Solutionaries Collective: On FB @ EastsideSolutionariesCollective
- General Baker Institute: [generalbakerinstitute.com](http://generalbakerinstitute.com)
- Nox Library: On IG @noxlibrary or [linktr.ee/noxlibrary](http://linktr.ee/noxlibrary)
- Outlier Media: [outliermedia.org](http://outliermedia.org); Text DETROIT to 67485
- Planet Detroit: [planetdetroit.org](http://planetdetroit.org)
- Swords Into Plowshares: [swordsintoplowsharesdetroit.org](http://swordsintoplowsharesdetroit.org)

## LGBTQIA+ Networks & Support

- Affirmations LGBTQ+ Community Center: [goaffirmations.org](http://goaffirmations.org)
- LGBT Detroit: [lgbtdetroit.org](http://lgbtdetroit.org)
- The Ruth Ellis Center: [ruthelliscenter.org](http://ruthelliscenter.org)

## Health & Healing

- Detroit Heals Detroit - [detroithealsdetroit.org/](http://detroithealsdetroit.org/)
- Healing by Choice - [healingbychoicedetroit.com](http://healingbychoicedetroit.com)
- Shai Doula Services - On IG @shaidoulaservices



